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Art Deco Architecture in India: Not Just Bombay

by

Mr Mustansir Dalvi

on Tuesday, 7th December 2021 at 5:30pm

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Synopsis: Bombay has conventionally been associated with Art Deco architecture, always compared to and competing with cities like Miami. While the city certainly displays a large collection of buildings identified in this style, this lecture expands the appreciation of Art Deco in India by demonstrating its ubiquity all over the country. To appreciate Art Deco one must look to contemporary developments in the 1930s and 40s in terms of mobility, livelihood, aspirations, popular culture and aesthetic choices. The paradigmatic change in building technology, especially the rising use of RCC transformed building all over India, leading to the easy assimilation of the style. In this lecture we will look at its early adoption, as a kind of High Indian Art Deco, by some princely states, and then move to the more quotidian expressions of this architecture by the Indian Middle classes. We will also further our gaze beyond our shores to see similar kind of building designs becoming popular in cities dotting the edge of the Indian ocean. Before full blown Modernism that would be seen in India post independence, Art Deco in India was truly the avant-garde for the architecture of a modern and cosmopolitan nation state.

Mustansir Dalvi is Professor of Architecture at Sir J. J. College of Architecture. He has post graduate qualifications in Architecture and Indian Aesthetics from the University of Mumbai. He received the PhD Degree from the Indian Institute of Architects-Bombay in 2017. The title of his doctoral research is: 'Buildings as Text: Developing a Semiotic of Bombay's Art Deco Architecture (1930-1949)' He is a member of the Academic Council and the Chair of the Board of Studies in Architectural Education of the University of Mumbai. He is on the Board of Governors of the MMRDA Heritage Conservation Society and a trustee at the NGO Art Deco Mumbai. Mustansir Dalvi has lectured, read and published several papers on architectural education, architectural history and heritage, urban transformation and architectural semiotics. He is the editor of '20th Century Compulsions' (Marg), a collection of writings about early Indian modernist architecture from some of the most important practitioners of the time. His latest book is 'The Past as Present: pedagogical practices in architecture at the Bombay School of Art' (Sir JJ/UDRI). Mustansir Dalvi is a columnist for various online and print news outlets, where he critically observes Mumbai's urbanity and charts the semiotics of its contradictions. He is particularly interested in the development of Bombay's architecture during its emergence as a vibrant metropolis.



Misr Insurance Building, Cairo, Egypt